

THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

**SRI LANKA: PUT CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE HEART OF THE NEW PRESIDENTIAL AGENDA**

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International civil society is calling on Sri Lanka's newly elected President Maithripala Sirisena to put civic freedoms and civil society participation at the heart of his 100 day plan.

Global civil society alliance, CIVICUS, and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR) are urging the new president to start afresh in his country's treatment and dealings with civil society and minority groups.

"In Sri Lanka, human rights defenders have spoken up for voiceless people suffering from the conflict and post-conflict violations between the government and the Tamil minority. The new government must listen to their voices and incorporate their demands in decision making and transitional justice processes," said Dr. Nimalka Fernando from IMADR.

Under ex-President Mahinda Rajapaksa, individuals and organisations were routinely chastised and repressed, creating a highly [repressive environment for civil society](#). In September 2014, CIVICUS and IMADR joined national and international CSOs in a [submission](#) to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group highlighting numerous attacks on human rights defenders, encroachments on civil society space, threats to journalists and pervasive military control in areas inhabited by the Tamil minority. The recently concluded January 2015 elections were also marred by political violence and high levels of intimidation towards human rights defenders. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) recorded 237 major and 183 minor incidents during the election campaign in what many civil society observers termed as a "blatant failure" of the state to protect its citizens.

"President Sirisena's administration has a key opportunity to heal the deep rifts in Sri Lankan society caused by the decades long political conflict," said Dr Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, Secretary-General of CIVICUS. "We urge the President to see civil society as an important partner in this endeavor."

CIVICUS and IMADR call on the Sri Lankan government to put in place concrete measures to protect the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In particular, they urge an end to harassment of civil society groups working to ensure accountability for victims of human rights violations.